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THE HEMISPHERE

CUBA

The Bitter Family

The passenger manifest on Cubana Airlines' twice-weekly Flight 464 from Havana to Mexico City included the usual Communist Chinese businessmen, returning Latin American "students," and privileged Cubans permitted to travel abroad. Among them was a chubby young woman with a Cuban diplomatic passport. "I came to see my sister Emma," she told the Mexican immigration man. He nodded idly and passed her through. He knew her by sight, and so did Mexican reporters. Fidel Castro's sister Juanita had made the trip before. "It looked to me like she had watery eyes, as if she was ready to cry or to say something," a newsman told his city editor that night. "Those Cubans," snorted the editor. "You never know what they are going to do."

Ten days later, Juanita Castro Ruz called a press conference and tearfully announced that she had defected from Cuba. "I cannot longer remain indifferent to what is happening in my country," she said. "My brothers Fidel and Raúl have made it an enormous prison surrounded by water. The people are nailed to a cross of torment imposed by international Communism."

Never Close. The news caused an instant, shocked sensation in Latin America, where by tradition, if not always in fact, middle-class families are large, close-knit—and tight-lipped. But the Castros of Birán (pop. 2,000), in eastern Oriente province were never very close. Cubans who remember them in the 1920s and '30s paint a picture of a hard, avaricious father, Angel Castro, and his bitter, complaining, common-law wife, Lina Ruz. Angel started by selling railroad ties to United Fruit Co., soon bought into a sugar-cane property,

expanded into cattle, built himself a general store, and by various, sometimes shady deals had amassed more than \$500,000 at his death in 1958.

There were seven children—Angelita, 40, Ramón, 39, Fidel, 37, Raúl, 33, Juanita, 31, Emma, 29, Agustina, 25—and two others fathered by Angel during a first marriage, Pedro Emilio and Lidia, both fortyish. That first marriage was not ended by divorce until Lina had already borne Angel five children. Then, finally, Angel married her, despite his loud-spoken accusations that Raúl had been sired by one of Lina's many other lovers. Neighbors remember that this gnawing suspicion later brought Angel to file, then cancel, a divorce suit. In the midst of such braying accusations and inconstancy, Fidel soon grew indifferent to the family—all except his worshipful brother Raúl. Nevertheless, when Fidel and Raúl went into the Sierra Maestra, most of the family rallied to their cause, sending food and supplies, raising money, going up in the hills to help organize his guerrilla camps. In 1958 Juanita, then 24, even traveled to the U.S., to plead for funds.

Disaffection set in soon after Fidel came to power. When the two revolutionaries insisted on imposing "agrarian reform" on some of the family estates, Ramón, who had worked hard maintaining the property, angrily exploded: "Raúl is a dirty little Communist. Some day I am going to kill him." Emma, only mildly involved to begin with, met and married a Mexican, then moved out of the country. Next, the bearded Fidel's antireligious measures infuriated his mother. When Castro declared himself a true Marxist-Leninist, Juanita too threw up her hands in despair.

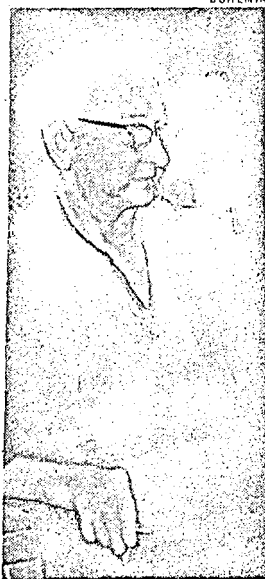
Angry Scenes. Quietly, she turned her Havana home into an underground refuge. She protected anti-Castro rebels

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fleeing the police, slipped out bits of intelligence information, and is credited with helping at least 200 people to escape the island. Fidel obviously knew much of what was going on. Yet to arrest the Maximum Leader's own sister would stir a major scandal. His agents kept her under surveillance, but she came and went as she pleased. Last August, after the mother died, there was a violent episode when Fidel decided to expropriate the family land once and for all. Juanita started selling the cattle; Fidel flew into a rage, denounced her as a "counterrevolutionary worm," and rushed to the Oriente farm.

On that occasion, her protector was Raúl, who was still fond of her, and warned her in time to flee into hiding in nearby Camagüey province until Fidel simmered down. It was probably Raúl who also cleared the way for her final trip to Mexico. Her ruse of making a "visit" was far too flimsy to fool anyone. She took along 21 bags.

Fidel may not have known. "This incident for me is personally very bitter," he told reporters with controlled fury last week, charging that "her statements were written in the United States Embassy in Mexico City." He then ordered the press never to ask him about the matter again.



FIDEL'S MAMA LINA RUZ



SISTER JUANITA
The worm turned.



SISTER EMMA